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Spy suspect said to be double agent

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LONDON — The defense said yesterday that a former NATO economist on trial as a Soviet spy was a double agent working for Canada and France as well as for the Soviet Union.

"Are you aware the defense in this case would be that Hugh Hambleton was at all material times a Canadian and French agent who successfully penetrated the Russian espionage organization?" defense attorney John Lloyd-Eley asked a police witness during the third day of Hambleton's trial at the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court here.

Detective Supt. Peter Westcott, who helped interrogate Hambleton, 60, after his arrest in Britain in June, replied that the first he knew of the double-agent contention was in a "hint" during a closed session of the court earlier yesterday.

"I heard something to that effect this morning," United Press International quoted Westcott as saying.

(He said he was aware only of news reports that the Canadian government, in 1980, waived spy charges against Hambleton after Soviet espionage equipment and NATO documents were found in his possession.)

(The officer said he had been ordered not to ask Canadian police for copies of their interviews with Hambleton when he was under investigation in November 1979.)

Lloyd-Eley made clear that Hambleton would contend that members of the French security service had visited him in Canada.

Hambleton, a NATO economist in Paris from 1956 to 1961 and an economics professor at Laval University in Quebec since 1964, pleaded not guilty Monday to two charges of spying for the Soviets between 1956 and 1979.

Despite the plea, his attorneys have not challenged his statements to police after his arrest in which he described nearly three decades of work for Soviet agents, including photographing hundreds of NATO documents.

The statements as outlined in court by the prosecution contained no mention of being a double agent. Hambleton said he tried to restrict the information he passed to include only undamaging material, and he quit his NATO job because he could "no longer cope."

He also said that he had a "sense of belonging" with the KGB, the Soviet secret police, and that he continued working for the Soviets after he quit NATO.

He told police that Soviet agents "pushed" him to join NATO's economic directorate in Paris. In his 1955 application, read in court, he offered to work without pay if no paid post was available because he was eager to join an organization "which contributes so directly to the defense of the Free World."

Hambleton, who has dual Canadian and British nationality, was arrested by Canadian police in November 1979, and evidence indicating espionage was found at his office and home and at his mother's home.

But Canadian Solicitor General Robert Kaplan told questioners Tuesday in the House of Commons in Ottawa that the evidence was insufficient to charge him under Canada's Official Secrets Act. Kaplan said the law needed a major overhaul.

Defense attorneys conceded earlier that the material seized by Canadian police included nine confidential NATO documents, decoding and message-sending equipment and what appeared to be instructions on locations of dead letter boxes. The NATO documents dealt with Guinea, Belgium, Turkey and France and included a general paper on oil supplies.

British Attorney General Sir Michael Havers told the court Tuesday that Hambleton while working in Paris gave the Soviets more than 80 top-secret NATO documents carrying the organization's "cosmic" classification; meaning disclosure could result in "exceptionally grave damage" to the alliance.